

When a Shilling Bought a Square Meal and 50 Cents a Feast

Annals of New York Restaurants That Flourished Long Ago Show Cost of Living Was Source of Grumbling Then as Now, Despite Contrast in Prices—Extracts From Old Letters and Philip Hone's Diary Throw Interesting Light on Manners, Problems and Pleasures of Everyday Life in the Early '80's

By ARTHUR B. MAURICE.

WHETHER it be a matter of a hundred years or six years the study of a bill of fare of a hotel or restaurant of old Manhattan is certain to stir the New Yorker of to-day to envy of both palate and of

the manners, daily problems and annoyances and pleasures of the old city. He was a New Yorker not merely because he happened to be born in the city, but because of his great capacity for grumbling at every possible occasion. When the cost of living went up he dropped politics and social events to sulk at the rapacity of the pur-

veyers of food, raw and prepared. When they went down again he apparently felt no particular gratification in making no mention of the fact, simply recording his irritations in other directions.

When he did not wish to dine in his home, which stood on the site now occupied by the Woolworth Building, all he had to do was to go next door to the American Hotel. For 50 cents a substantial meal might there be had. Here is a menu of the hotel for a June day in 1848. There was apparently no reason why a patron should leave the table hungry. The French dishes are printed just as they appeared in the original bill of fare.

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the well to do of New York deplored a rate that was considered to border on exorbitance. That rate was \$1.50 a day, American plan.

Two years earlier Horace Greeley had arrived in New York. He knew no one in the town, and had just \$10 in his pocket. He entered the first tavern and asked advice of the bar-

abused present. There was the same complaint about profiteering, although the practice was not called by that name. But for some reason or other conditions soon changed for the better, and the years from 1822 to 1855 were years of apparent plenty and reasonable prices.

There was in 1825 at the corner of



AT A HOTEL TABLE IN THE OLDEN DAYS.

pocketbook. Yet it is possible for him to derive a measure of satisfaction by recalling that, just as ten years or so ago he himself was quite unconscious of his temporary good fortune, so the Manhattanite of the days of far greater plenty and lower prices found no particular joy in them, but was probably moved to grumble if he came across a menu of some thirty or forty years earlier.

Recently the present writer was shown some personal and gossiping letters written in the seventies by a man who had been born in Greenwich Village, had lived there all his life and was destined to die there. Every now and then there was an allusion to the exorbitant charges of the market men and the general upward tendency in hotel prices.

In one letter he was moved to genuine exasperation. He had been reading a book and one passage in particular had stirred him to a sense of his wrongs. The book was a description of Charles Dickens's second visit to the United States, written by his secretary, Charles Dobley. When the vessel bringing the novelist and the chronicler to America stopped at Hull's Landing, a barrow full of lobsters might be had for sixty cents, and people ate only the claws, tossing the rest away. "A barrow full of lobsters for sixty cents!" records the indignant Greenwich Villager. "And the other day I was charged the outrageous price of forty cents for a single broiled lobster. The wealth of this country is going to the farmers and the hotel keepers."

Then there was Philip Hone, who from 1828 to 1851 kept the voluminous diary that is the best picture we have

of the manners, daily problems and annoyances and pleasures of the old city. He was a New Yorker not merely because he happened to be born in the city, but because of his great capacity for grumbling at every possible occasion. When the cost of living went up he dropped politics and social events to sulk at the rapacity of the pur-

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keeper. The latter shook his head. "We're too high for you," he said after an appraising glance at the new stranger in New York. "We charge six a week." Horace agreed. He found a boarding house which took him in for \$2.50 a week. When he grew tired of the fare there he, in company with the other boarders, indulged in the weekly dissipation of a meal in a sixpenny dining saloon in Beekman street. There a repast of several courses might be had for the sum of 12½ cents. Though not elaborately served it was first class food.

A dollar in the markets of 1851 went a long way. "It would," recorded Abram C. Dayton in his "Last Days of Knickerbocker Life in New York," "buy three times the amount of food and pleasure as now, in 1871."

Four years wrought a startling change. Prices were high like sky-rockets and New York housekeepers howled as loudly as ever they are howling to-day. Panic conditions ruled the land. Would not these entries from Hone's diary for days in 1855 and 1857 do in spirit for the diary of a New Yorker of 1919?

"Living in New York is exorbitantly dear, and it falls pretty hard on persons like me who live upon their income, and harder still upon their large and respectable class whose support is derived from fixed salaries. Marking of all kinds with the exception of apples and potatoes, is higher than I ever knew it. The sweat of the brow of New York all runs into the pockets of the farmers. I paid to-day 1½ cents a pound for hay, three times the ordinary price. I laid in a winter stock of 400 to 500 pounds of butter at 2 shillings and 4 pence 2½ cents. In the long course of my thirty-four years housekeeping I never buttered my bread at so extravagant a rate. There are many persons in New York as good as myself who must be content to eat dry bread this winter, or at least spread the children's slices confoundedly thin."

"The market was higher this morning than I have ever known it. Beef, 26 cents; mutton and veal, 15 to 18 cents; small turkeys, \$1.50. "Markets continue extravagantly high. The farmers (or rather the market speculators) tell us that it is owing to the scarcity of corn; but the shade, the cheapness of which makes them in ordinary seasons a great resource to the poor, are not to be bought under 75 cents and \$1. Is this owing to the scarcity of corn, or are the fish afraid to come into our waters lest they be caught in the vortex of Wall Street? Brooms, the price of which time out of mind has been 25 cents, are now sold at half a dollar; but corn is scarce. Poor New York!"

"History Repeats Itself."

"Poor New York!" was the cry in 1837. "Poor New York!" had been the cry just twenty years earlier. The winter of 1817 was a very hard winter. The best beef went to 12½ cents a pound, pork and veal to 10 cents, and the best turkey to \$1.50. Large turkeys to \$1.50, fresh butter to 25 cents, and potatoes to 25 cents a barrel. Poor New York!

If that trite old saying about history repeating itself still continues to hold good the housewife and the supporter of the family should find crumbs of comfort in the story of one hundred years ago. The last forty months of the second decade of the nineteenth century were as trying in proportion to the average income as the justly

Fulton and Water streets a famous Shilling Plate and Two Shilling Ordinary. To put the matter more plainly, for the sum of twelve and a half cents a patron of the establishment might sit down to a meat dish and accompanying vegetables. For twenty-five cents the entire bill of fare was at his disposal.

An Englishman who visited the States in 1830 left a record of the prices at Fulton Market, which, he said, "surpasses any I ever saw for richness and abundance of supply." Here is an excerpt from his list:

	Pound.
Best cuts of beef	8 to 12c
Common cuts of beef	4 to 8c
Mutton	4 to 8c
Lamb	6 to 8c
Veal	6 to 8c
Pork	6 to 8c
Butter	15 to 18c
Eggs	12c to 15c
Chickens (pair)	50 to 60c

The list indicates the market conditions of those blessed old days. The proprietor of a hotel or restaurant was also favored in other ways. He paid his waiters ten to twelve dollars; his boys six to seven dollars a month with board and lodging; his cooks eight to ten dollars; his dish washers four to five dollars. A guide book published in 1844 listed 128 eating houses in New York, not including those establishments that served only oysters. Going on Nassau street dined with one thousand persons a day. Here is a bill of fare with prices for a day of 1851 of Chamberlain's saloon in Pearl street, a famous refectory of the period.

	6c.
Beef	6c.
Mutton	6c.
Chicken	6c.
Beef	6c.
Veal	6c.
Mutton	6c.
Pork	6c.
Roast Pig	12c.
Duck	12c.
Chicken	12c.
Goose	12c.
Veal Pie	6c.
Beef Steak Pie	6c.
Lamb Pie	6c.
Mutton Pie	6c.
Clam Pie	6c.
Pork and Beans	12c.
Oyster Pie	12c.
Chicken Pie	12c.

The abundance in evidence at public establishments was reflected at the home table of the old time New Yorker. Turn again to Philip Hone's Diary for 1835. He wrote:

"Ten gentlemen met and dined to-day, being the first regular meeting of a club which was there organized to dine at each others' houses every Monday. A summary law was enacted confining the dinner to soup, fish, oysters and four kinds of meat, with a dessert of fruit, ice cream and jelly. Hone's own dinner hour was 4 o'clock and he apparently found the restriction in the matter of courses trying for in 1841 he recorded: "A strict observance to the limitation of four dishes! So strict that by gastronomic sophistry it extends to a dozen,ysters being transformed into fish, brand being coming under the denomination of vegetable and veal sweetbreads being pronounced of the genus confectionary."

Of those famous gatherings of the

Home Club Dr. Francis wrote: "A Devonshire duke might have been founded at the amplitude of the repasts and the richness and style of the entertainments."

According to Hone, in 1840 a déjeuner à la fourchette was a novelty in the States and then the last cry in the matter of imitating transatlantic manners. The company assembled about 1 o'clock and remained till 4. At 2 breakfast was served, consisting of coffee and chocolate, light dishes of meat, ice cream and confectionery, with lemonade and French and German wines. After the young people had finished this repast there was round dancing. Thorburn, moralizing in 1848, threw light on existing conditions and prices. He wrote:

"You are only a clerk with \$500 a year. If you expect to be a merchant get married. You leave your office at 7 or 8 in the evening and stroll up Broadway, where you fall in with one

or two companions. You step into Niblo's and call for three glasses of ice cream (8 shillings); another companion joins you—you call for a cigar and four are handed (1 shilling). Your income is \$500, while mine fifty years ago was only \$300. Then you go to the theatre for 50 or 75 cents; the porter or oyster house comes next in rotation. Now more money is paid to servants in some of those five story houses for rubbing, scrubbing and polishing of brasses and furniture, for wiping, dusting and breaking of glasses and china, than it took to support a decent family fifty years ago. People were certainly happier then."

No matter how moderate his appetite and simple his wants the visitor in New York to-day would hardly be likely to find cause for complaint if at the end of his stay the finest hotel in the city were to present a bill calling for \$2.50 a day for his room and his meals. Yet as late as 1859 that price

stirred protest. Here is an editorial on the subject from a New York weekly paper (*Harpers Weekly*, October 1, 1859):

"In the first place, what can be more preposterous than to establish a fixed rate of fare at hotels? Big, fat, bloated, blustering Guzzie goes to the Astor House for a week, and in virtue of his standing and his paunch gets a room near the dining saloon, a large, airy room looking on the park, with lounge, armchairs and pier glasses, Brussels carpet and other furniture, all rich and luxurious; at dinner he eats pate de foie gras and woodcock, at supper he has elaborate little dishes which exercise an experienced cook for an hour or two, at breakfast he has salmon at 50 cents a pound, for all of which Guzzie pays \$2.50 a day. The Rev. John Jones has a cup of weak tea for his breakfast, a slice of beef for his dinner and a room under the eaves, and pays the same \$2.50."

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Dance of the Epileptics in Luxemburg

By CHARLES A. DAILEY.

THE soldiers of the American Army of Occupation who are stationed in the village of Echternach, in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, will be called upon in all probability to police a strange and horrifying procession which will take place in the town June 19, the Tuesday after Whit Sunday. For the first time in five years the ceremony will be uninterrupted by the war and hundreds if not thousands of pilgrims from Luxemburg, Belgium and occupied Germany will participate in the ancient ceremony, an ordeal that tries the nerve of the onlooker.

Echternach, an ancient town of 4,200 inhabitants on the River Sure, is about fifteen miles from Luxemburg, the capital of the Grand Duchy, and about twelve miles as the crow flies from Treves. It possesses a well preserved Benedictine abbey, founded in 693 by St. Willibrod, the patron saint of the epileptics. Tourists seldom visited Echternach as it is somewhat off the beaten path even of those visiting Luxemburg and Treves. Yet those who do find much of interest. The abbey maintained its independence down to 1801 and its chief point of interest to the visitor is the abbey church of St. Willibrod, a Romanesque edifice of 1017-31, with Gothic additions of the thirteenth century. It was restored in 1861 and subsequently, and lovers of the artistic have been shocked by the gaudy interior painting.

The annual "dancing procession" which made Echternach a town of gossamer fame was participated in annually before the war by 15,000 persons, many of whom were attracted by curiosity, but enough of them crippled pilgrims to make the sight a never-to-be-forgotten one. Attracting, as the ceremony will, a curious as well as a devotional crowd, the American troops garrisoned in the vicinity of Echternach probably will have a busy day since the Sure marks the boundary line between Luxemburg and Germany.

The writer, in the course of a visit to Luxemburg, Treves and the surrounding country in 1906, was just a bit too late personally to witness the annual ceremony, which that year attracted epileptics from all parts of Europe, inspired by the belief in the powers of the bones of St. Willibrod, the healer. That year particular interest attached to the ceremony as the bones of St. Willibrod had been transferred from the old parish church in which they had lain since 1794, having been in the Basilica from his death in 739 until the removal to the church was ordered.

One must summon up a great deal of courage indeed to witness the procession of the epileptics, for to be cured the pilgrims must dance a distance of a mile and a quarter. The dance is a kind of irregular march, in the course of which each person, to the accompaniment of music, makes three steps in a forward and two in a backward direction, thus making in all a series of five steps in order to advance one.

One did not gather on talking with the inhabitants that St. Willibrod was himself a healer, but that the Abbot of

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